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News Release ~ Communiqué

Tribute to Jackie Robinson marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

MONTREAL, MARCH 21, 1995 - During a ceremony this morning at the YMCA du Parc marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the governments of Canada and Québec, the Ville de Montréal and the Communauté urbaine de Montréal paid tribute to the late Jackie Robinson.

In 1945, Jackie Robinson signed a contract with the Montreal Royals, the farm team of the Brooklyn Dodgers, making him the the first Black player in a professional baseball league. In 1947, he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and became the first Black player in Major League baseball.

During the ceremony, spokespersons also paid tribute to the Montreal population for its welcome of Mr. Robinson and its openness towards people of all origins.

Spokespersons present at the ceremony were the Honourable Sheila Finestone, Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Serge Ménard, Minister, Sécurité publique, Pierre Bourque, Mayor of Montreal and Vera Danyluk, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Communauté urbaine de Montreal.

Paul Brown, a historian specializing in Black history, spoke of the impact Jackie Robinson's arrival had on Montreal and of the North American social climate then and now.

Representatives of the public institutions each gave a cheque of $5000, for a total of $20,000, to Howard Dayle, president of the Montreal Association of Black Business Persons and Professionals, for the Jackie Robinson Scholarship Awards. Traditionally given to students from the Black community to continue post-secondary studies, these scholarships will now be awarded to students from the other visible minority groups.

A commemorative plaque was unveiled during the ceremony. The inscription refers to Jackie Robinson's talent and perseverance. It also says that with the signing of Robinson's contract, Montreal acquired an important place in the history of civil rights in North America. The plaque will be installed on the YMCA du Parc building.

On behalf of the Canadian government, Mrs. Finestone said, "Recognized around the world as a welcoming country, Canada is aware of the importance of promoting activities that counter racial discrimination. Paying tribute to Mr. Robinson is a celebration of humanity's victory."

Mr. Ménard added, " Back in the days when Mr. Robinson practiced his profession, Montreal and the Province of Quebec were already welcoming. This example of openness inspired, and continues to inspire, Québecers of all origins in their project to build, here, an open, tolerant and respectful society."

During his speech, Mr. Bourque said, " Montreal has distinguished itself in North America as a metropolis of tolerance. The welcome our city offered to Jackie Robinson, fifty years ago, is tangible proof. For a whole generation of young people, especially from the Black community, he became a hero and role-model."

Speaking for the CUM, Mrs. Danyluk added, "Our tribute, to Mr. Robinson and to the population of the Montreal region underlines our commitment to serving all the citizens, of diverse racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, on the island of Montreal."

March 21 was proclaimed the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by the United Nations in 1966. This date marks the anniversary of a tragic massacre of peaceful anti-apartheid demonstrators in South Africa.

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This year, March 21 is celebrated as part of the United Nations' International Year of Tolerance.

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